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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000077

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PARM](#) [SY](#) [IS](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: BERRI CITES SYRIAN-SAUDI RELATIONSHIP AS  
KEY TO LEBANON'S POLITICAL CRISIS

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Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey Feltman for Reasons: Section 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

SUMMARY

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11. (C) In his last meeting with the mbassador, a pessimistic  
Parliament Speaker Nabi Berri cited better relations between  
Syria and audi Arabia as the key to resolving Lebanon's  
poitical crisis. He continued to insist on a 10-10-0  
cabinet formation, and stressed that a meeting etween  
majority leader Saad Hariri and Free Patrotic Movement  
leader Michel Aoun was necessary t demonstrate that Arab  
League Secretary Amr Mousa's visit to Lebanon resulted in  
some progress. Berri also reiterated his view that no  
constitutional amendment is needed to elect Lebanese Armed  
orces Commander Michel Sleiman as president. End ummary.

BERRI OFFERS CONDOLENCES

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12. (C) The Ambassador, accompanied y Pol/Econ Chief and  
Senior FSN Political Advisor paid a farewell call on  
Parliament Speaker Nabi Berr a his ffc inAin el-Tineh  
on January 7. Berri advisor Ali Hamdan also was present atthe meeting. Berri, expressing condolences for th January  
15 car bomb that hit an Embassy vehicle, injuring two Embassy  
local employees, did not believe the attack was directed at  
the Ambassador, ut said it might have been a message to the  
U.S.in light of the President's Middle East trip and hs  
comments on Lebanon. Stating that he was not defending  
Hizballah, Berri also said he did not believe the group was  
responsible for the attack, aguing that it was not in  
Hizballah's interests t target the U.S. and noting that  
Hizballah Secreary General Hassan Nasrallah himself had  
strongly condemned the attack.

SYRIAN-SAUDI RELATIONS KE TO LEBANESE CRISIS

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13. (C) Turning to Arab League ecretary General Amr Moussa's  
ongoing visit, Beri, who had met with Moussa the previous  
evening and was scheduled to meet with him again later in th  
day, cited the Syria-Saudi Arabia relationship s key to  
resolving Lebanon's political crisis. e said he was "less  
optimistic" than before thata solution would be found given  
that the two countries were unable to talk to each other.

BERRI ISISTS ON 10-10-10

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4 (C) Berri also continued to insist on a 10-10-10  
distribution for the majority, opposition, and pesident in  
the next cabinet. He claimed Moussa had told him that Arab  
League leaders from Syria, audi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, and  
Qatar, in a meeting with Moussa ten days earlier in Cairo,  
had no discussed actual numbers, to avoid causing probles  
amongst themselves (i.e., between Syria and Saudi Arabia).  
But Berri reportedly told Moussa thatthe declaration issued  
after the meeting was hisoric in that it demonstrated that  
Arab countriespreferred to give Christians weight in  
Lebanon, hich, in his view, implied a 10-10-10 distribution  
of cabinet seats. Berri told the Ambassador he wuld open  
parliament to elect a president today i there was agreement  
on this formula.

...AND USHES FOR AOUN-HARIRI MEETING

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15. (C) Berri stressed that Moussa's success in arranging a  
meeting between majority leader Saad Hariri and Free  
Patriotic Movement leader Michel Aoun was necessary to

demonstrate that Moussa's visit resulted in some progress, though he admitted that such a meeting probably would not lead to a solution to the crisis. (Note: The meeting, which Moussa attended, occurred shortly thereafter, with former President Amine Gemayel attending with Hariri to dispel Aoun's claim that he is the sole representative of the Christians. End note.)

NO NEED FOR CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT

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16. (C) Finally, Berri reiterated his view that no constitutional amendment is needed to elect Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Michel Sleiman, arguing that Article 74 of the constitution (which addresses the election of a president under unusual circumstances) overrides Article 49 (which stipulates that sitting high-level government officials need a two-year cooling off period before being elected president). The Ambassador pointed out that, under this logic, Article 74 could also override other provisions in the constitution, including the two-thirds quorum requirement. Berri immediately rejected this possibility.

COMMENT

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17. (C) Berri, not wanting to use the term "pessimistic," said he was less optimistic than before about finding a solution to the ongoing crisis. This time, however, he pinned the blame on external actors, Syria and Saudi Arabia. Berri's recounting of the Arab League meeting in Cairo is not consistent with what Moussa told the Ambassador in their January 12 meeting (reftel), i.e., that the Arab League members had not discussed the 10-10-10 formula.

18. (C) Berri's interpretation of Article 74 is equally selective. While, by his own admission, Berri opposes a constitutional amendment in part because he does not want PM Siniora to come to parliament (the cabinet would be present for the parliamentary vote) and thus suggest that he sees the Siniora cabinet as legitimate, we find his efforts to pick and choose bits of the constitution that suit him more disturbing. Furthermore, Aoun, in his own eternal quest for the presidency, will surely challenge any election that has even the slightest hint of possible legal impropriety.

FELTMAN